

How old is your postcard?

http://www.chicagopostcardmuseum.org/postcard_age.html

Do you have an old postcard and curious about its age? If the postcard is used, the most check the date on the postmark. However, there are many postcards that were never mailed or that a part of the post mark is illegible or soiled. Here are some general guidelines to help determine the age range of your post card.

Date when postcards were first mailed:

1870 - Switzerland, Great Britain

1871 - Belgium

1872 - Russia, France

1873 - U.S. (government issued and pre-stamped), Romania, Japan

1874 - Germany

Postcards started to be sent internationally in 1875, after the first meeting of the General Postal Union in Berne, Switzerland.

The first commercial postcards produced in the U.S. were sold at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago Illinois. These were the first privately printed souvenir postcards in the country.

Does your card have the words "Private Mailing Card, Authorized by Act of Congress on May 19, 1898" on the back?



example 1 - pre-1901 private mailing card back

The words "Post Card" were not printed on postcards until December 24, 1901. Cards previous to that had to have the Private Mailing Card Statement. So, if your card is marked "Private Mailing Card," it dates from 1893 - 1901.

Is the address side divided?

A divided back postcard (example 3) has a line down the middle, or some other indication that one half of the back is for the address

and the other half is for a message. Early postcards had an undivided back (example 2). The back of the postcard was for the address only. There was often a statement that said "this side for address only." The postal service started allowing the use of divided back postcards in March of 1907. If your postcard has an undivided back, it is from 1907 or earlier.



example 2 - undivided back

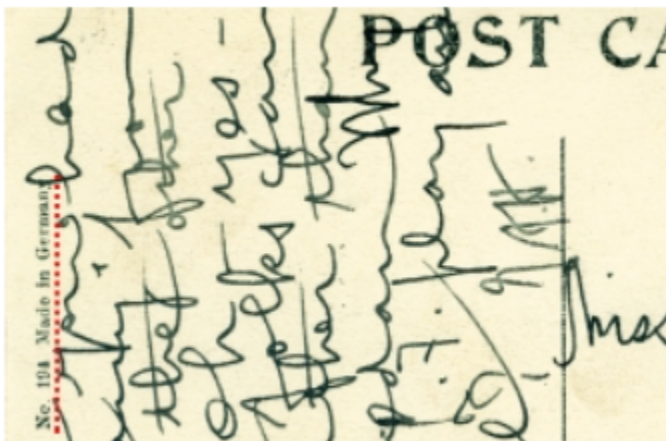


example 3 - divided back

Does the postcard back indicated that it was printed in Germany?

Many early postcards were printed in Germany. The German cards were of exceptional quality and are some of the best examples of old postcards available.

However, World War I shut down the German printing presses and cards started being printed in the United States or imported from Great Britain. If your early postcard says it was printed in Germany, it is from before 1915.



example 4 - mark is underlined in red

Is there a white border around the picture?

The White Border era dates from 1915 to 1930. The white

border was introduced by the U.S. during World War I in order to save ink and

estimated to have saved 20% more ink.



example 5 - white border non-linen

Does the postcard paper have a texture like woven linen?

Postcards from 1930 to 1944 were printed on a linen texture paper. They also used brightly colored inks. Borders are not uncommon.

Does the postcard have a shiny finish on the front, with a color photographic image?

Photochrome postcards have been produced from 1945 to present. Colored borders, partial borders and scalloped edges can be found.



example 7 - photochrome with scalloped edging



example 8 - real photo card ca. 1900 (undivided back)

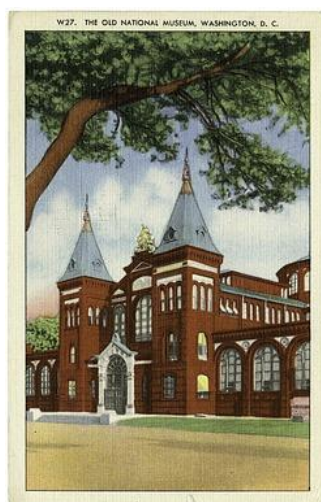
The photochrome postcard should not be confused with Real Photo Postcards. Real photo postcards are actual photographs printed on postcard paper. The vintage ones are black and white photography. There may be some indication on the back of the card about the type of photo paper used - this is often indicated by the stamp box, which will be visible if your postcard is unused.

Dating Postcards

<https://siarchives.si.edu/history/featured-topics/postcard/dating-postcards>

There are several ways to date postcards that are seemingly undated. This page provides a few general methods for determining a time period or date for postcards.

GENERAL POSTCARD CHRONOLOGY



Postcard of the Old National Museum, by Capitol Souvenir Company, April 13, 1939, Smithsonian Archives - History Div, SIA2011-2285 (front) and SIA2011-2286 (back).

Postcard producers printed cards that followed the current trends of postcards. Dates can be approximated by the material and design of a postcard. Our Postcard History page provides information about these general trends. For example, a card printed on linen was most likely produced between 1930 and 1945. However, it is important to remember that these dates and time periods are not concrete—they are only generalizations of trends in the postcard industry.

POSTAGE



Postcard of the Castle Sent to Miss Harman, June 21, 1921, B.S. Reynolds Co., Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 95, Box 84, Folder: 25, Negative Number SIA2011-2304. siris_sic_13875 (left); Postcard of the New National Museum and DC, May 24, 1928, Curt Teich & Co., Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 95, Box 33, Folder: 12, Negative Number SIA2013-01126 (right).

The rate of postage for postcards has changed throughout time and can be used to find an approximate date for postcards. Not all postcards have the required postage amount printed on them, so this method can only be used in instances when the postage is known. The following list is postage for postcards mailed within the United States.

Date	Rate (USD)	Date	Rate (USD)
Pre-1873	0.02	March 22, 1981	0.12
May 12, 1873	0.01*	November 1, 1981	0.13
November 2, 1917	0.02	February 17, 1985	0.14
July 1, 1919	0.01	April 3, 1988	0.15
April 15, 1925	0.02	February 3, 1991	0.19
July 1, 1928	0.01	January 1, 1995	0.2
January 1, 1952	0.01	July 1, 2001	0.21
August 1, 1958	0.03	June 30, 2002	0.23
January 7, 1963	0.04	January 8, 2006	0.24
January 7, 1968	0.05	May 14, 2007	0.26
May 16, 1971	0.06	May 12, 2008	0.27
March 2, 1974	0.08	May 11, 2009	0.28
September 14, 1975	0.07	April 17, 2011	0.29
December 31, 1975	0.09	January 22, 2012	0.32
May 29, 1978	0.1	January 27, 2013	0.33

*The postage rate for most government-produced postcards was \$0.01. However, depending on which government-produced postcard it was, the postage could range

between \$0.01 to \$0.04.² The postage for privately produced postcards was \$0.02. This rate for privately produced postcards went down to \$0.01 on May 19, 1898, with the passage of the Private Mailing Card Act.

POSTCARD SIZE



Postcard of "The Wedding Procession of Prince Dara-Shikoh", by Unknown, 1997, Smithsonian Archives - History Div, SIA2013-07761 (front) and SIA2013-07762 (back).

In the early stages of postcard production, government-produced postcards varied in size, depending on the type of postcard.³ Privately produced postcards, also known as private mailing cards, did not need to adhere to the government restrictions. On June 1, 1878, the General Postal Union, an international postal organization, signed a new treaty, changing its name to the Universal Postal Union. This treaty set the maximum size for postcards produced by governments of member nations at 3.5 x 5.5 inches.⁴

The Private Mailing Card Act of May 19, 1898, stipulated that private mailing cards measure 3.25 x 5.5 inches. After 1901, postcards typically measured 3.5 x 5.5 inches, although variations in size exist. In the 1960s, some printers began producing 4 x 6 inch postcards. Today postcards vary greatly in size and shape, so it is more difficult to use size to date them—but if the size or shape of the postcards differs from the above standards, it's safe to assume that they were probably made within the past few decades.

CURT TEICH POSTCARDS



Postcard of Manicuring Day for Soko, by Curt Teich & Co, 1935, Smithsonian Archives - History Div, SIA2013-07820 (front) and SIA2013-07821 (back).

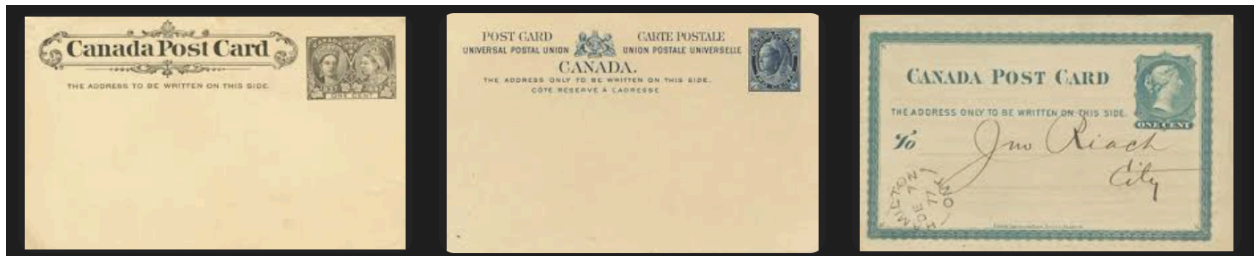
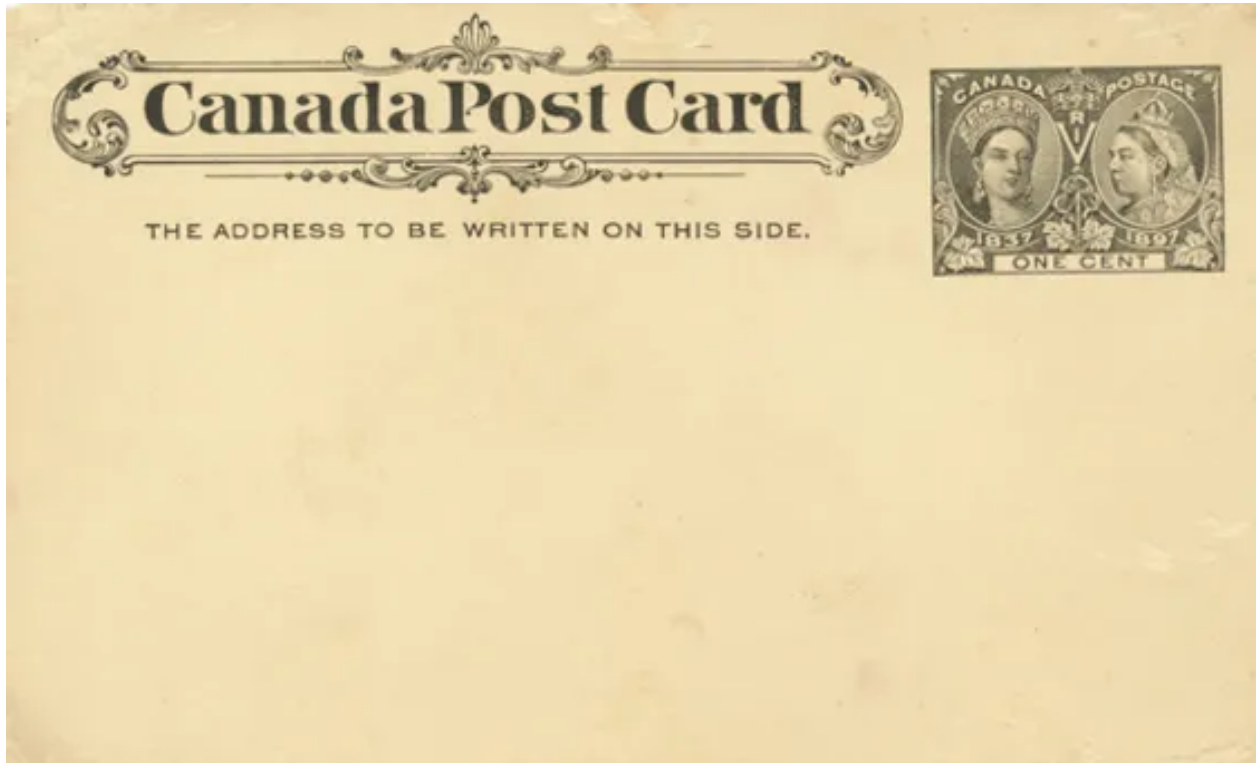
Curt Teich & Co., a postcard printing company, operated from 1898-1978 and specialized in view (postcards that have scenic views) and advertising postcards.

Curt Teich was the largest volume printer of these types of postcards in the world from the 1920s to the 1940s. Many of the postcards we have at the Archives were printed by Curt Teich & Co. It is easier to give Curt Teich postcards an approximate date because the postcards' print numbers correspond to production years. This dating guide compiled by the Curt Teich Archives, a wonderful wealth of images and information, provides detailed information about the postcard print numbers and dates.

POSTCARD ERAS :

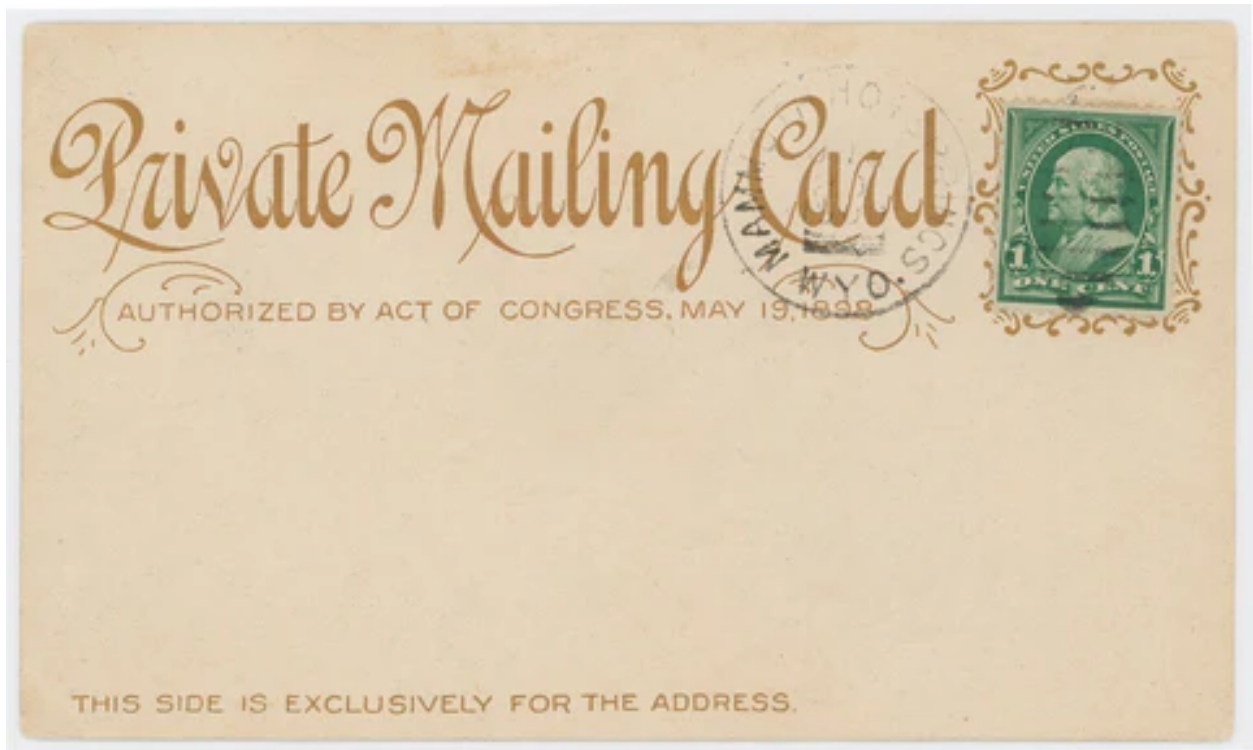
Much of the contents of these guidelines were excerpted with permission from the Beginner's Guide to the Hobby of Postcard Collecting, The Capital of Texas Postcard Club. Thanks also to Chuck Harbert; and to Nina Webber, whose donated postcards are used for the examples on this page. Compiled by Todd Ellison, Certified Archivist (last revised 8/7/2006)

Pioneer Era (1893-1898)



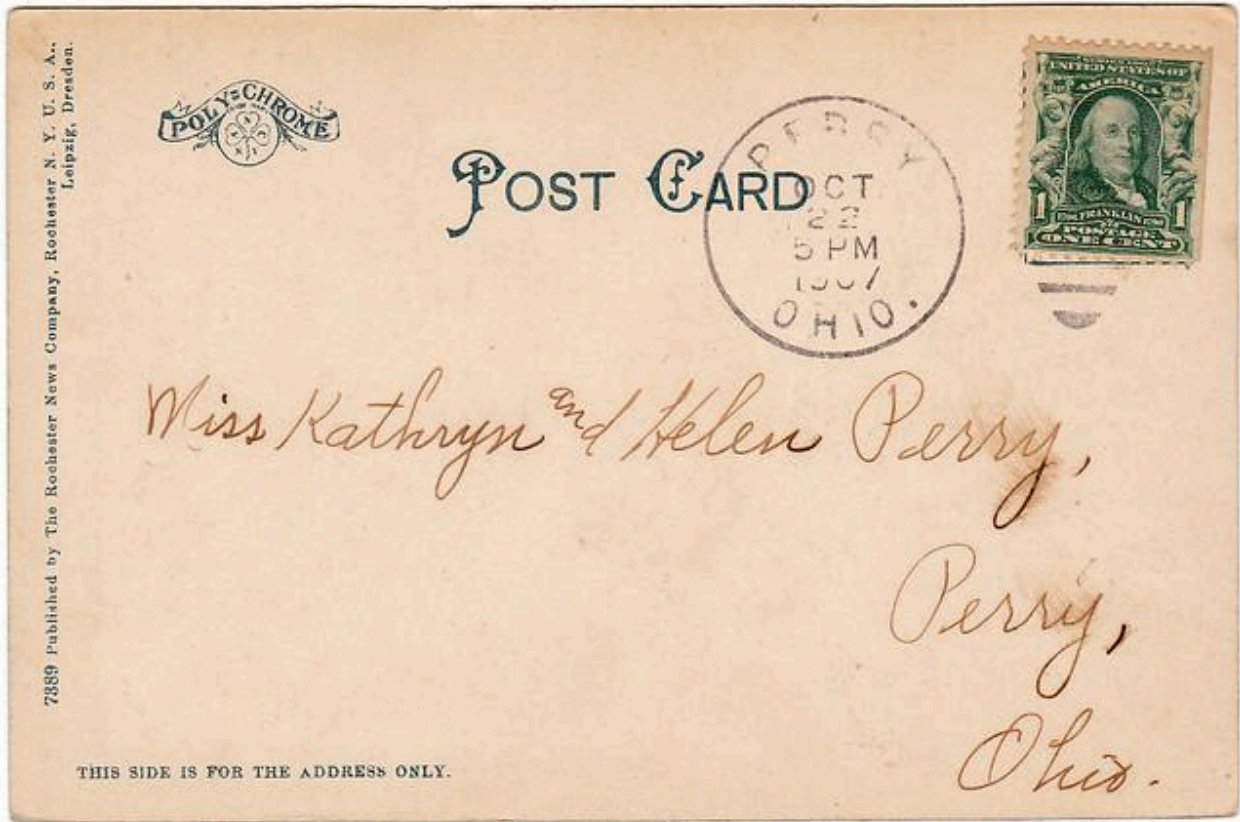
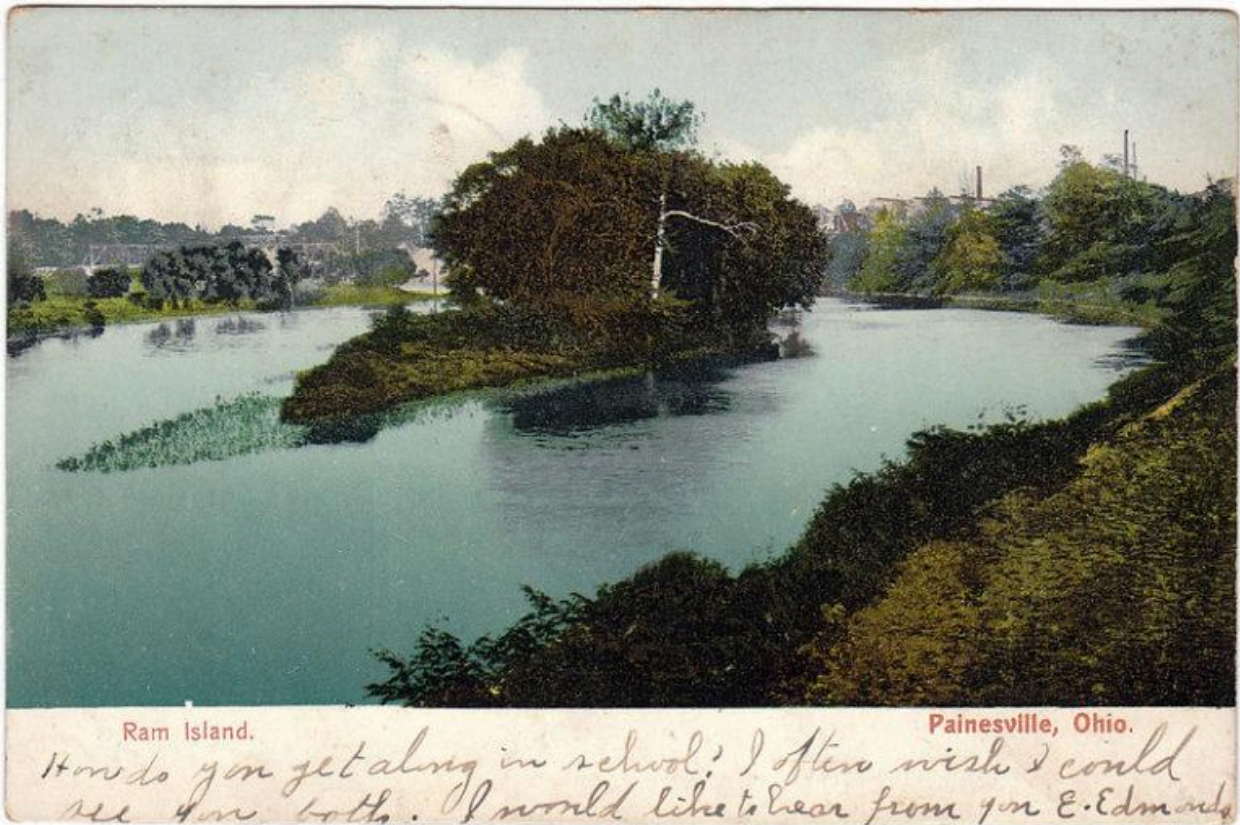
Although the world's first picture postcards date from the 1860s to the mid-1870s, most of the earliest American picture postcards extant today are those that were sold at the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois, starting on May 1, 1893. These were illustrations on government-printed postal cards and on privately printed souvenir cards. The *government* postal cards included a printed 1-cent stamp; the *privately printed souvenir* cards required a 2-cent adhesive postage stamp to be attached. Messages were not permitted on the address side of the cards; after attempting various forms of explaining that regulation, the U.S. Post Office adopted the printed message that "This side is for the address only" (Staff, p. 62). Other backs from this pioneer era of the American post card are known today as "Souvenir Card" and "Mail Card." This period ended by July 1, 1898.

Private Mailing Card Era (1898-1901)



An Act of U.S. Congress on May 19, 1898 granted private printers permission to print and sell cards that bore the inscription “Private Mailing Card.” Today these cards are referred to as “PMCs”. The required postage was a 1-cent adhesive stamp. At this time, a dozen or more American printers began to take postcards seriously. Still, no message was permitted on the address side. The term “Post Card” was not widely used until the early 1900s (it was later contracted to “postcard” as a word-counting cost-saving measure).

Post Card Era - Undivided Back (1901-1907)



New U.S. postal regulations on December 24, 1901 stipulated that the words "Post Card" should be printed at the top of the address side of privately printed cards. Government-issued cards were to be designated as "Postal Cards" (Staff, p. 62). Writing

was still not permitted on the address side. In this era, private citizens began to take black and white photographs and have them printed on paper with post card backs.

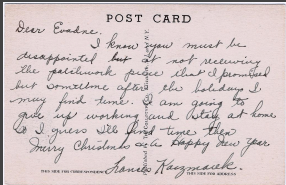
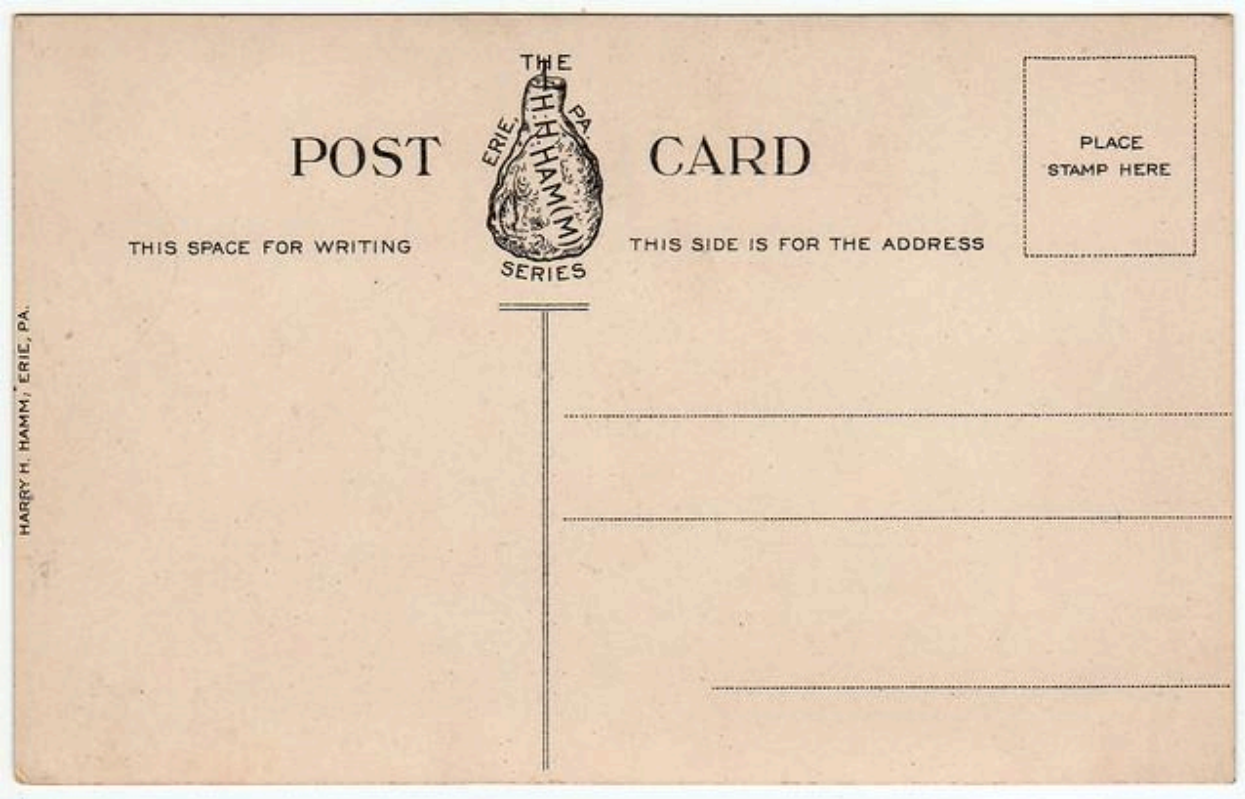
If no message was permitted on the address side, the card probably pre-dated March of 1907.

Real Photo Postcards (1900-ongoing)



Postcards that are actual photographic replications were first produced around 1900. They may or may not have a white border, or a divided back, or other features of postcards, depending on the paper the photographer used. Many of the real photo postcards being done at the current time are reproductions of earlier historic photos. The easiest way to distinguish a real photo postcard is to look at it under a magnifying glass; it will show smooth transitions from one tone to another. [Click here](#) for links for dating real photos.

Early Divided Back Era (1907-1914)



Postcards with a divided back were permitted in the U.S. beginning on March 1, 1907. (Britain had already pioneered this in 1902.) The address was to be written on the right side; the left side was for writing messages. Many millions of cards were published in this era -- it was the golden age of postcards. Up to this point, most postcards were printed in Germany, which was far ahead of the United States in the use of lithographic processes. With the advent of World War I, the supply of postcards for

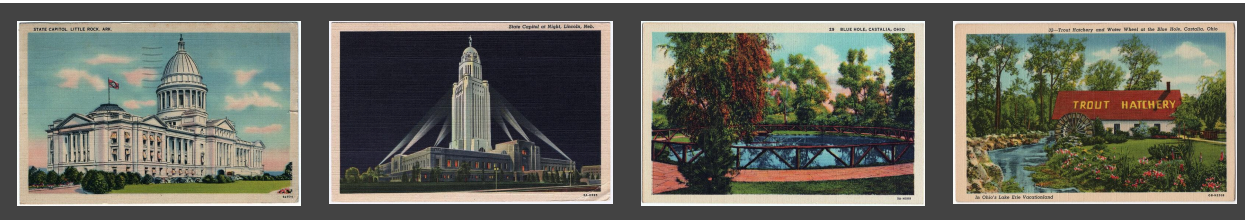
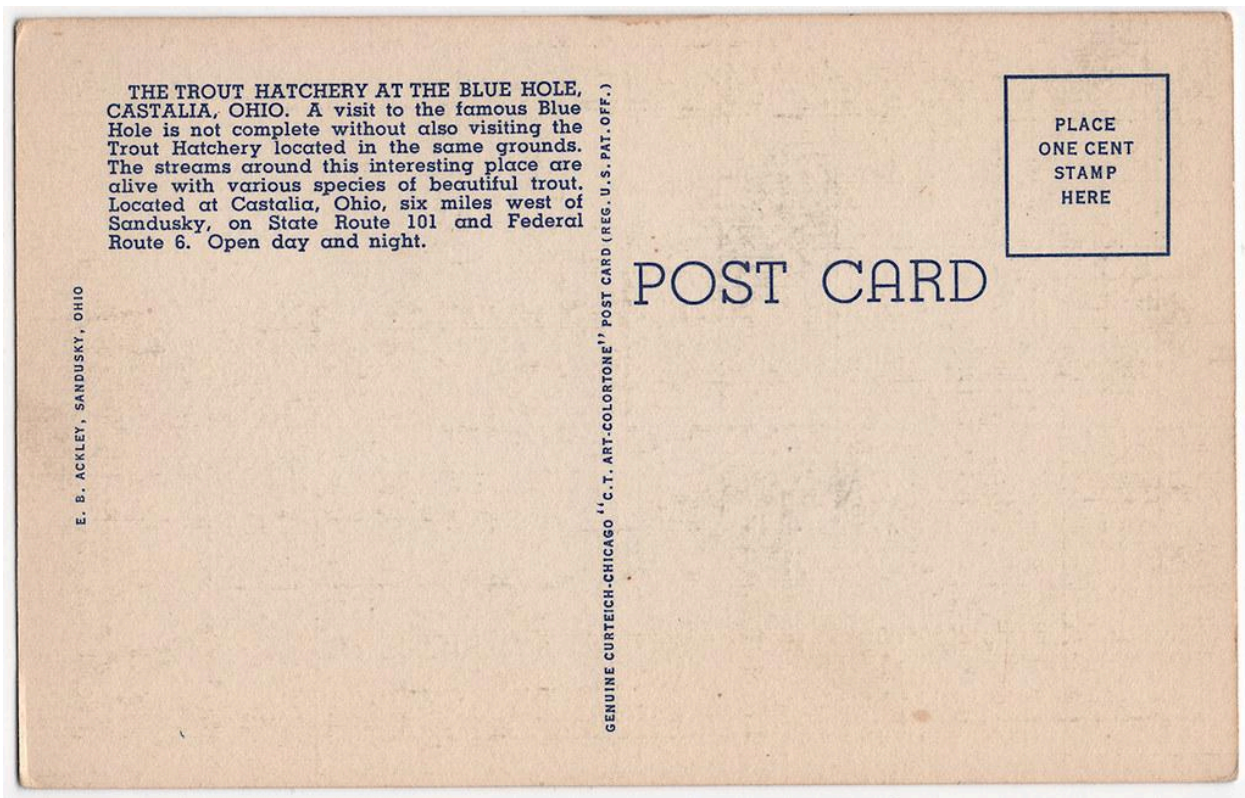
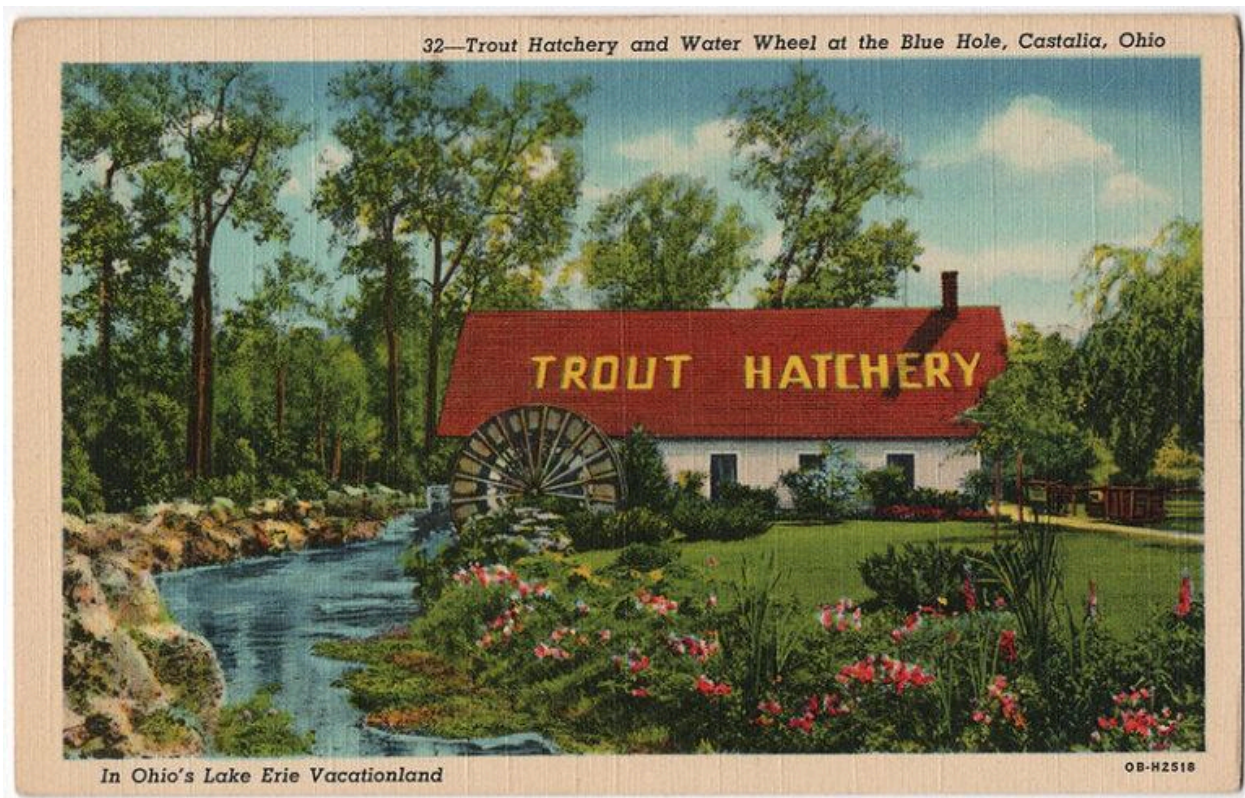
American consumption switched from Germany to England and the United States itself.

White Border Era (1915-1930)



Most United States postcards were printed during this period. To save ink, publishers left a clear border around the view, thus these postcards are referred to as “White Border” cards. The relatively high cost of labor, along with inexperience and changes in public taste, resulted in the production of poor quality cards during this period. Furthermore, h3 competition in a narrowing market caused many publishers to go out of business.

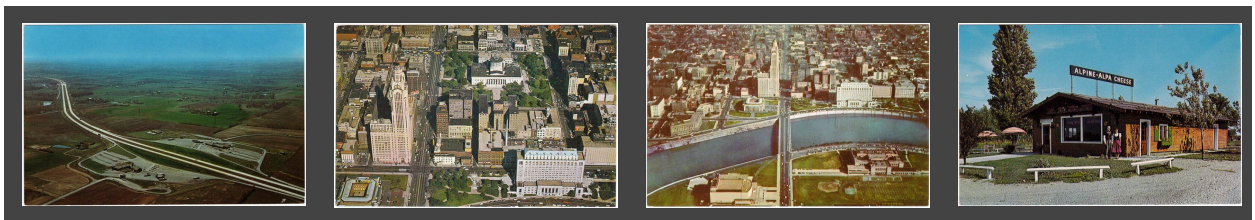
Linen Era (1930-1945)



New printing processes allowed printing on post cards with high rag content that caused a linen-like finish. These cheap cards allowed the use of gaudy dyes for

coloring. The firm of Curt Teich flourished because of its line of linen postcards. Many important events and scenes in history are documented only by these cards.

Photochrome Era (1939-ongoing)



"Chrome" postcards began to dominate the scene soon after the Union Oil Company placed them in its western service stations in 1939. Mike Roberts pioneered his "WESCO" cards soon after World War II. Three-dimensional postcards also appeared in this era. By 1960s, the standard size of cards had grown to 4 x 6 inches.

Photochromes are not real photos but rather, printed cards done by a photochrome process. To distinguish a printed postcard from a real photo postcard, examine it under a magnifying glass and you will see the dot pattern that is characteristic of printed cards.

"The best printed cards were produced done by the photogravure process. They are difficult to discern from real photos but usually don't have the glossy finish of photographs. The Laura Gilpin cards of Mesa Verde and Silverton are excellent examples of the photogravure process." (Source: Chuck Harbert, email to the author, 8/7/06)

ARTICLE: Greetings from the Past: Identifying and dating postcards

<https://www.antiquetrader.com/collectibles/greetings-from-the-past-identifying-and-dating-timeless-postcards>

Why dating postcards is important

Deltiology, numismatics and philately are reportedly the three most popular interests in the field of collecting (yawning yet?). In just the first line of this article, I have managed to make it sound confusing, pretentious, and even strange. Especially that last line, which seems like something you'd read in the police blotter. "In a raid early this morning police captured three philatelists." Nevertheless, these are the actual and proper names for postcard, coin, and stamp collecting, respectively. More precisely numismatics encompasses the collecting of coins, paper money, and medals. This article, however, will categorize landmarks or eras in American postcard production. Plus it will provide useful methods for identifying and assigning a date of manufacture.

Postcards: Trendy and Topical

In 1913, during the height of postcard mania, the United States Post Office (USPS website, www.usps.com) estimates more than 900 million postcards appear in the mail. This is a staggering statistic when you consider that the population of the United States during the same year was less than 97.5 million people. That averages out to just more than nine postcards a year mailed for every person in the country. With hundreds of millions of postcards mailed each year during the Golden Age of Postcards (1907-1915) it is not surprising that antique postcards are so popular and still readily available to collectors.



In identifying and dating postcards there are specific eras, defined by both style and dates; however, these dates do not account for the transition from one era to the next. It is important to remember that these "Eras" refer to the printing on the back of

the postcard. This differs from postcards identified as Real Photo, Art Nouveau and Art Deco. The naming convention of these examples are classified by the image on the front of the postcard. Real Photo, Art Nouveau, and Art Deco period postcards were produced in more than one of the classic postcard eras. For example, Art Nouveau period postcards were produced during the Pioneer Era. In addition, there is the Private Mailing Card Era, Undivided Back Era, and the Divided Back Era. Changes in style and production format overlap.

Columbian Expo Aids in Early Postcard Popularity

Postcard Eras begin with the Pioneer Era (1889 to 1898). This period's roots lie within the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. In May 1893 vendors exhibited and sold picture postcards to the public. Pre-stamped postcards had been introduced decades earlier. Yet, the Columbian Exposition was the first venue that introduced postcards to the masses.

Cards from the Pioneer Era are scarce and easily identifiable by the presence of certain indicators. Those most prized by collectors are known as the “Gruss aus” cards. These were German postcards from the Pioneer Era. The cards usually reveal several views on the front with the words “Gruss aus.” This translates to “Greetings from.”

It wasn’t long before the American and British markets produced their own domestic multi-view cards with the words “Greetings from” on them. The back of American pioneer cards are not divided. They often bear the words “Souvenir Card” or “Mailing Card.” Plus, there is no “Act of Congress” acknowledgement.

Government-printed postcards during this time required one-cent postage and have pre-printed stamps of Grant or Jefferson. Privately printed postcards required two cents of postage and used U.S. postage stamps. Many Pioneer Era postcards have multiple views on the front of the card along with the words “Greetings From” or “Souvenir of.” The back of the card was meant for the address only; any message had to be written on the front of the card.

Government Presence Part of Private Mailing Card Period



The next era is the Private Mailing Card Era (1898-1901). As of May 19, 1898 private vendors were allowed to print and sell postcards. These cards bear the words, “Private Mailing Card” and the government notice “Authorized by Act of Congress May 19, 1898.”

Postcards still have undivided backs reserved for the address of the

recipient; any sentiment or message was limited to the front of the card.

Some postcards from this period have a blank white area on the front of the card below the image for a written message. Some cards bear an image on only a portion of the card with most of the front left for a message. Still others have no place for a message, which is why many cards from this era have a message written on the image itself. Private Mailing Cards with messages written across the image are no longer considered inferior; they are scarce enough that those with messages written on the image are prized.

The **Undivided Back Era (1901-1907)** is the next milestone in the production of postcards. Although all postcards prior to this time have undivided backs, this is the first time the use of the words "Post Card" was permitted. Very late in 1901, on December 24, 1901 to be precise, the government also allowed private printers to use a logo; the back of the card was still reserved for the address of the recipient.

Lion and Unicorn Among Earliest Logos

Perhaps the most famous and easily recognizable logo to the postcard collector is the Tuck lion and unicorn logo. This logo first appears during this postcard era. The majority of postcards produced during this time were from Europe, especially Germany, which was well known for rich chromolithography. By this time postcards were so popular it is estimated that production doubled every six months. It was during this era that postcards in series of two or more were first printed. Popular topics for series included: romance, fantasy, fashion, comedy, art, theatrical themes and anthropomorphism, especially with cats, dogs, bears, fowl, and rabbits.

It was during this Golden Age that the most vibrant, memorable, imaginative and nostalgic images were produced. Companies in Germany printed many of these brightly colored images. Suddenly there were postcards for every holiday. There were postcards for New Years, Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Washington and Lincoln's birthdays. In addition, April Fool's Day, Fourth of July, Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas are popular. Birthdays, souvenir images, comic cards, and postcards to simply send well wishes are also prevalent. There were even postcards in Hebrew celebrating Jewish holidays and New Year's Day. Most of these cards, although printed in Germany, were in English; however, there were many greetings in German sent within the United States and to the United States.

One type of postcard that is rarely addressed is the puzzle postcard. These are a series of four to six postcards with each card being a portion of the image. Once all components in a series were received, they could be placed together like a picture puzzle to complete the entire image. These are very difficult to encounter as they have usually been separated through the years.

Postcards Suffer Impact of War

The outbreak of World War I dealt a devastating blow to the postcard industry from which it never recovered. Most of the large postcard companies were based in Europe, especially Germany. The Divided Back Era ended and the Golden Age of postcards yielded to the next era known as the **White Border Era (1915-1930)**.



During the White Border Era many Italian artists such as Umberto Brunelleschi, M. Montedoro and Sofia Chiostrì produced some of the most dazzling images in the Art Deco style – especially of women, but these are

rarities. Many American companies attempted to satisfy the demand for postcards. However, the quality was not up to the standards of the chromolithographs from Germany. The stock was often insubstantial, even flimsy, the colors dull, and the subject matter mediocre; white borders economized on ink. The term White Border Era is loosely descriptive in the sense that a majority of postcards produced during this time were printed with a white border around the image.

It is not an absolute, however, in that not every postcard with a white border is from this time period nor does every postcard from this time period have a white border. It is not unusual to find postcards from the Golden Era reprinted with a white border during the White Border Era; however, when comparing the quality the difference is obvious at once.

Dig Into The Details to Learn More

There are many books and price guides about antique and vintage postcards. Many include three more “eras” such as Real Photo, Art Nouveau, and Art Deco (an abbreviation of the French “Arts Décoratifs”). I hesitate to include the last two as eras since they are actually styles of art. In terms of postcards the Art Nouveau and Art Deco styles overlap the postcard eras. Art Nouveau style postcards existed during the Pioneer Era, Private Mailing Card Era, Undivided Back Era, and the Divided Back Era. Art Deco postcards existed during the Divided Back Era, White Border Era, Linen Era and the early part of the Photochrome Era. Some postcard collectors, even experts, may disagree but I’m holding fast.

Because the average “antique dealer,” flea market vendor, and garage sale merchant knows very little about postcards, it is a field of collectibles that is forever ripe and rife with little treasures at bargain prices. Even if you are a novice in the field of postcards, you will be able to start hunting tomorrow prepared with what you have just read and probably make some great finds. Most of my pioneer era and Gruss aus cards came from bargain boxes where they were relegated because they had writing on the front (I know, I know, you’re shaking your head in profound disbelief).

If you do decide to collect postcards I recommend you obtain an informative postcard book and study it – the reading will pay off. You might try the following book by Krause Publications: “Postcard Collector, Greetings From The Way We Were” by Barbara Andrews. Learn about condition, care, and rarities and have fun collecting.

How to Identify and Date Real Photo Vintage Postcards



<https://www.playle.com/realphoto/>

Help for identifying the age and paper manufacturer of Real Photo Old Postcards

Most Real Photo Postcards, abbreviated RPPC, have information on their backs to help in identifying the manufacturer of the photographic paper that was used by the postcard publisher. If you can identify the paper manufacturer, you can approximate the age of the old postcard. If the postcard has a stamp box, click on one of stamp box links below. If there is no stamp box, or a generic stamp box, go to [Postcards Backs](#).

Stamp Boxes for Real Photo Vintage Postcards

Select an alphabetical link to identify the paper manufacturer

[A-B](#) [C](#) [D-E](#) [F-J](#) [K-L](#) [M-O](#) [P-Q](#) [R-T](#) [U-Z](#) [Unknown Manufacturers](#)

How to tell the difference between a Real Photo Postcard and a printed Postcard

There is some confusion on what **Real Photo Postcards (RPPC)** are, and how to differentiate from a printed postcard. Real Photo Postcards are photographs that are reproduced by actually developing them onto photographic paper the size and weight of Postcards, with a Postcard back. There are many Postcards that reproduce

photos by various printing methods that are NOT "real photos"...the same methods used when reproducing photos in magazines and newspapers. The best way to tell the difference is to look at the Postcard with a magnifying glass. If the photo is printed, you will see that it is made up of a lot of little dots, the same as a photo printed in a newspaper. A Real Photo Postcard is solid, no dots.

Postcard paper types and descriptions from period literature and advertisements prepared by Jeremy Rowe

Quick Reference Real Photo Old Postcard Dating Guide

This chart is not as complete as the detailed information available in the Stamp Box links above.

PAPER	Dates	Notes
AGFA/ANSCO	1930-1940s	
ANSCO	1940-1960	2 Stars at top & bottom
ARGO	1905-1920	
ARTURA	1910-1924	
AZO	1926-1940s	Squares in corners
AZO	1904-1918	4 triangles pointed up
AZO	1918-1930	Triangles 2 up, 2 down
AZO	1907-1909	DIAMONDS in corners
AZO	1922-1926	Empty Corners
CYKO	1904-1920s	
DEFENDER	1910-1920	Diamond above & below
DEFENDER	1920-1945	Diamond inside
Devolite Peerless	1950-	
DOPS	1925-1942	
Du Pont	1945-1950s	
EKC	1939-1950	
EKKP	1904-1950	
EKO	1942-1970	
KODAK	1950-NOW	
KRUXO	1907-1920s	
KRUXO	1910-1920s	Xs in corners
MULTISCOPE & FILM CO-WISC.	Pre-1909	BADGER
NOKO	1907-1920s	
PMO	1907-1915	

SAILBOAT	1905-1908	Sailboat in circle
SOLIO	1903-1920s	Diamonds in corners
VELOX	1907-1914	Diamonds in corners
VELOX	1901-1914	Squares in corners
VELOX	1909-1914	Triangles: 4 pointed Up
VITAVA	1925-1934	